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AFRICOM FOR AMBASSADOR HOLMES AND MG SHERLOCK  
JOINT STAFF J5 FOR COL SALCEDO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/09/2020  
TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [TS](#)  
SUBJECT: TUNISIAN DEFENSE MINISTER GRIRA LOOKING FORWARD TO  
JMC

REF: A. TUNIS 85  
[1](#)B. TUNIS 81 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

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Summary and Recommendation  
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[1](#)1. (C) In the course of a February 8 courtesy call on newly-appointed Defense Minister Grira, the Ambassador reviewed the historically close cooperation between the U.S. and Tunisian militaries; stressed the need to expand military engagement and cooperation in light of the threat posed by terrorism and especially AQIM; and underscored the need for substantive discussions of Tunisia's strategic vision, defense strategy, military posture, and the role of U.S. security assistance and cooperation within that strategy at the upcoming Annual Planning Conference and Joint Military Commission (JMC). Minister Grira demonstrated knowledge of U.S. assistance programs and expressed his desire to expand engagement. Executing the JMC as a counterpart visit will significantly enhance the potential for increased military-to-military engagement with Tunisia. End summary and recommendation.

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Positive Meeting with Defense Minister Grira  
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[1](#)2. (C) On February 8, Ambassador Gray paid a courtesy call on newly-appointed Tunisian Defense Minister Ridha Grira. Also in attendance were Colonel Major Mohamed Ghorbel, Director of International Relations and Cooperation; Captain Major Mohamed Khammasi, International Relations Officer on the Defense Minister's Cabinet; and the U.S. Senior Defense Official/Defense Attache. Welcoming the Ambassador, Defense Minister Grira opened with the observation that terrorism affects all countries, not just Tunisia. He noted that Tunisia has a long history since the 1950s of combating the roots of terrorism through social development programs for the population and especially through education. He then stressed the need for our two countries to cooperate and to share intelligence and information, noting that Tunisia can benefit greatly from the U.S. experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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Turning Positive Relations into Increased Engagement  
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¶3. (C) The Ambassador recalled the tradition of cooperation between our countries and militaries and stressed that the relationship is important to us, especially our cooperation against a shared terrorist threat. He went on to express our interest in expanding the exercise program, noting particularly the need to conduct exercises outside of the Cap Serrat training area. Considering that the primary threat is posed by AQIM and terrorism in the Trans-Sahel, the Ambassador pointed to the benefit for both militaries in training in the Sahara regions of Tunisia. The Defense Minister interrupted by saying "absolutely."

¶4. (C) The Ambassador went on to stress that it is important to plan our joint activities and exercises over the next three years, and that the upcoming Annual Planning Conference provides the best opportunity for that joint planning. The Defense Minister agreed, noting that while the terrorism problem is regional, threatening not just Tunisia, we can profit by sharing experience and knowledge. He noted that it is the same for maritime operations.

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Intelligence Cooperation  
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¶5. (S/NF) The Ambassador continued by noting the importance of exchanging intelligence and expressed his appreciation for the participation of the Deputy Director of Military Security and two analysts in the recent analyst seminar

hosted by the AFRICOM Intelligence and Knowledge Development (IKD) Directorate at Molesworth, England. He shared his hopes that the Tunisian Director General of Military Security would be participating in the upcoming Directors of Military Intelligence Conference and a counterpart visit with the Director of AFRICOM IKD. The Defense Minister replied "with pleasure" and then reiterated the importance of security cooperation between our countries, noting that U.S. collaboration and recently-provided equipment have increased Tunisia's security capacity.

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Segue to the JMC and Substantive Dialogue  
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¶6. (C) Building on the Defense Minister's comments, the Ambassador said that the U.S. wants to continue to support Tunisian security, but pointed to the severe pressure on the U.S. budget caused by the global economic crisis. The Executive Branch must be able to justify its requests for foreign assistance to Congress, the Ambassador explained. Officials from the Pentagon, the Department of State, and the U.S. military would benefit from an in-depth explanation of Tunisia's defense strategy at the upcoming Joint Military Commission (JMC) meeting. Continuing, the Ambassador detailed the need for substantive discussion to justify continued support for, and engagement with, Tunisia. In particular, it will be important that Tunisia present its strategic vision, outline whom it sees as its primary enemies, explain how it is arming against that enemy, and discuss current and long term defense strategies for both the military and each of the services. The Defense Minister, nodding, replied "absolutely".

¶7. (C) The Ambassador continued with the request that discussion at the JMC include how engagement with the U.S. and American security assistance fit into its strategic and military plans, and Tunisia's vision of (and willingness to) engage in regional cooperation. He provided a non-paper with a number of questions he explained would be of great interest to U.S. participants at the JMC, and said that the U.S. would like to begin addressing these issues at the

Annual Planning Conference in March. The Defense Minister replied "no problem" and then stated the need to get together before the JMC. The Defense Minister accepted the letter of invitation to the April 27-29 JMC "with pleasure" and also indicated he would be amenable to traveling to Wyoming to accept a possible invitation from the Governor for an April 30 meeting.

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Historic Relationship  
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¶8. (C) The Defense Minister observed that, unlike other Arab nations, Tunisia has always held the same position and has always made the same choice, which has been to ally itself with the U.S. Never did Tunisia ever side with the countries of the Warsaw Pact or buy weapons from them - only the U.S. and the West. Recognizing our long and supportive relationship, the Ambassador thanked the Minister for his support during the recent visit of the AFRICOM Deputy to the Commander for Civil Military Activities, Ambassador Holmes.

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Comment and Recommendation on Next Steps  
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¶9. (C) This introductory call provided a good opportunity to deliver the message to the new Defense Minister that U.S. engagement requires substantive dialogue by, and cooperation from, Tunisia. Minister Grira's comments reinforce recent indications that the Government of Tunisia is seeking to improve bilateral relations with the U.S. (ref A). Particularly noteworthy was Grira's receptivity to conducting exercises in the Sahara region, his desire to work with the U.S. military to benefit from our experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, and his understanding of the FMF, 1206, and Excess Defense Articles programs.

¶10. (C) The USG should reinforce these themes at the Annual Planning Conference in March, and then again when the Ambassador meets with the Defense Minister before the JMC. Conducting the April 2010 JMC as a counterpart visit would greatly enhance the potential for increased military-to-military engagement with Tunisia, and would provide us with a significant opportunity to influence this influential Cabinet member (ref B) relatively early in this tenure.  
End comment and recommendation.

GRAY